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The Simen Wild Fauna under the Protection of the Government of Haile Selassie

From Endangered Prey to National Symbol (1941 – 1969)

*La faune sauvage du Simen sous la protection
du gouvernement d'Haïlé Sélassié:
de proie menacée à symbole national (1941-1969)*

From Menelik II to nowadays, different administrations have been in charge of the Simen Mountains: the Begemder and Simen “governorate-general” and then “province” during the imperial time, the Gondar Kifle hager during the socialist time, and the North Gondar zone after 1991. Found in the Amhara region since 1995, the Simen Mountains National Park nowadays covers a total area of 471 km², and includes the districts of Beyeda, Janamora, Debark, and Adi Arkay.

Simen (ሰሜን), sometimes Semen (ሰሜን), is a mountainous place limited to the north and east by the Tākāze River. Home to several endemic animals and highest mountain range in Ethiopia with its highest peak Ras Dejen topping about 4,620 m above sea level (Anberbir Mebrate, 1976: 3), the Simen massif consists of a series of mountains, rugged massifs, deep gorges, and dissected plateaus. The walia ibex (*Capra walie*), the gelada baboon (*Theropithecus*) and the Simen fox or Ethiopian wolf (*Canis simensis*), are among its most renowned fauna (Aysheshim Tiruneh, 2010: 4). In order to protect these natural values, a National park was officially established in 1969, and in 1978 the UNESCO World Heritage Committee declared the park as a World heritage.

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Following the discovery of the walia ibex in 1963 by a UNESCO-funded mission, the establishment of a national park became a subject of much correspondence among government officials and international experts, at different levels. The archives of the North Gondar Zone Administration Office also suggest that, before 1969, government officials, including Emperor Haile Selassie, were directly involved in the hunting of the wild animals of the Simen Mountains. Hence the need to underline the historical process that led to the establishment of the park.

The general objective of this paper is to reconstruct the history of wild animals poaching and of the walia ibex discovery prior to 1969. The study also tries to examine the behavior of the people and the government regarding animal species, and assess the kind of external assistance that has been given to the Ethiopian government for “saving” the walia ibex before the establishment of the park.

Travelers prior to the discovery of walia

A few travelers came to Ethiopia, visited the Simen Mountains and recorded their experience (Mengistie Desta, 2007: 71). James Bruce was probably the first one. Bruce travelled in February 1770 through Gondar-Lemalimo (Wulkifit Pass)-Adi Arkay-Aksum. He reported the difficulty of his journey, the distribution of people, and their cultures: housing building techniques, types of woods and crops, living conditions, etc. (Bruce, 1770: 192-193). Several detailed reports followed the one of James Bruce in the first half of the nineteenth century, notably by an English man called N. Pearce (1831: 24), the French Samuel Gobat, and a German man named Ruppell. For instance, Ruppell noted the presence of new species called Walia (Messerli & Aerni, 1978: 49-50). D’Abbadie, Ferret and Leffbure also left important accounts concerning the Simen Mountains. Lastly, at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century, the German man Rosen and an English man Maydon crossed the region between Debark and Ras Dejen (Messerli & Aerni, 1978: 44).

From Maydon to the arrival of Italians over Ethiopia, it seems that no foreign explorers came to the Simen. According to the account of native dwellers, the Simen was the basis of several military-geographic expeditions in the time of the Italian occupation (1936-1941) (informants: Mesfin Kebede and Behailu Nadew).

Wild animals and the modern State

According to Richard Pankhurst, hunting of wild animals was a common practice not only in the Simen but also throughout Ethiopia. Hunting was conducted to gather food supply, protect populations and fields from animal hazards, and get recognition by the local communities by gaining prestige and

Figure 1. The land feature of Simen Mountains

Source: Girma Tayachaw Asmelash, 2013



status. For instance, among the Oromo cultures of Southern Ethiopia, hunting big wild animals was an important activity between the 17th and the early 20th centuries. A person who killed five lions was entitled to wear over on his head a skin called *armlet*. Those who killed a lion or an elephant were also entitled to wear earrings. In other regions of the country, especially in its northern and central parts, hunting was one of the favorite pastimes of the lords, particularly the youngest ones. The society is usually said to consider wild animals as their enemy (Pankhurst, 1990: 168).

Three years after the Italian occupation, in 1944, the government of Haile Selassie I issued the first proclamation which provided protection for wild animals. According to the new proclamation, shooting or trapping wild animals without permission from the Ministry of Agriculture was illegal, and thus forbidden (North Gondar Archive (NGA): File No. $\Phi/1$, 14/08/1936 E.C.).¹ Yet, these pioneer regulations had no significant impact over local habits regarding both the hunting of wild animals and birds, and the use of plants and forests (NGA File No. 27/Λ; 07/08/1936 E.C.).

The government also tried to identify and list the wild animals in the Begemder and Simen governorate-general. All districts and sub-districts representatives listed the name of wild animals and their habitat but those of Janamora and Dib Bahir. As an anecdote, higher officials fined the two districts that refused to collaborate with fifty Ethiopian birr (NGA File No. 27/Λ; 07/08/1936 E.C.).

After having identified the heads and types of wild animals and their environment, the Imperial government introduced other law enforcement measures in 1947 and 1955. Yet, paradoxically, top government officials, with the support of Emperor Haile Selassie, ordered the governorate general to hunt and kill lions and other wild animals. Thus in a document dated October 7, 1958, *dejazmach* Kflie Dadi wrote urgently to Lieutenant Colonel

¹ The researcher used the E.C. (Ethiopian calendar) in primary sources (letters). The rest of secondary sources and following arguments used the G.C. (Gregorian calendar).

Gashaw Kebede, commander of the regional police force, ordering him to hunt 25 lions and send their skins:

መቶአለቃፈረደጥሩነህ 25 ባለጎፈር እንበሳ ታድኖ ጎፈሩ ለጥቅምት 15 ቀን 1951 ዓ.ም እንዲላክ ከክቡር ያገር ግዛት ሚኒስቴር የታዘዘውን አድነውና አሳድነው ጎፈሩን እንዲያቀርቡ ስለታዘዙ ለማደኛ 50 (ሃምሳ) የሚደረግ ጥይት እንዲሰጣቸው አሳውቃለሁ፡፡

Lieutenant Ferede Tiruneh is ordered by the Ministry of Interior to hunt 25 lions and send their skin on October 25, 1958. I hereby order that he should be given 50 bullets of Manisher rifle for hunting the lions (Ministry of Interior Archive (MIA): File No. ቀ/1; 19/02/1951 E.C.).

Kflie Dadi, then *enderasie* of governorate general, fulfilled the request of Mekonnen Habtewold, i.e. Lieutenant Ferede Tiruneh: with Kibebew Alemie and Zeleke Jember, he killed two lions that were sent by plane to Addis Ababa on October 25, 1958 (NGA File No. ቀ/1; 19/02/1951 E.C.; see also NGA File No. ጠ/41; 24/02/1951 E.C.). To confirm the arrival of the lion's skin in Addis Ababa, *liqe mequas* Kebede Mekonen, Vice Minister of Interior, wrote a letter to *dejazmach* Kflie Dadi on December 17, 1958: "while confirming the arrival of the skin of lions, I suggest that the hunters should be given incentives" (NGA File No. ጠ/41; 16/12/1951 E.C.).

In practice, the government encouraged officials to continue hunting and trapping wild animals. In addition, hunting was still widely practiced and its regulation was beyond the capacity of regional administrators. Hunters were particularly active in Janamora district (around Ras Dejen). A sub-district of Janamora, Sahla, in the regions of Mena, Aáela, and Bilha, was home to several wild animal species in particular. Among the wild species were impala, antelope, hyena hedgehog, and jackal, which were hunted by local hunters from the neighboring districts of Belessa, Wogära, and the sub-district of Kinfaz. At some point, a conflict between local people and hunters emerged when the former tried to stop the latter. To curb the activity of the poachers, the authorities of the Simen province wrote to the Begemder and Simen governor general to inform him about such illegal practice (NGA File No. ሸ/2; 09/12/1951 E.C.).

An interesting picture emerges regarding the fauna and flora of the Simen Mountains from the historical documentation. Hunting of wild animals was not only conducted by local people, but also by people from other districts such as Wogära, Kinfaz, and Bäläsa. In addition, the Ministry of Public Health also participated in the killing of wild animals, including hyenas, monkeys, and apes. The reason for this practice was that, while hyenas were thought to endanger the life of humans and domestic animals, monkeys and baboons were considered responsible for destroying farmers' crops. To carry out its goal, the Ministry of Public Health distributed poison to workers of the region in order

to kill wild animals. The mechanism used was simple: poison was put within natural water reservoirs or ponds where the wild animals were drinking. This system was applied for several years and, as a result, many wild animals disappeared. Yet, at some point the Ministry of Public Health decided to discontinue this strategy on the grounds that not only poison affected people's health, it was also too costly (NGA File No. ሸ/2; 30/09/1953 E.C.).

This notwithstanding, the governmental practice of killing wild animals did not stop. Instead, the duty was transferred from the Ministry of Public Health to the Ministry of Interior (NGA File No. ሸ/2; 30/09/1953 E.C.). Thereafter, the police force took the responsibility of killing wild animals (Ref. No. 7274/40/44). For instance, in 1962, the governorate-general police force ordered the Simen Awraja police force to kill the lions in the Sahel sub-district:

ከዚህ ቀደም በመተማ ወረዳ ላሞችን እንበሳ የበላቸው ስለሆነ በጥይት እንዲገደል ለጭልጋ እውራጃ ግዛት ጽ/ቤት በቁጥር 7274/40/44 ጥር 13 ቀን 1954 ዓ.ም ትዕዛዝ አስተላልፏል። አሁንም በሳህል ምክትል ወረዳ እንበሳ ኩብፋቻችን ከመበላቱ በፊት እንዲገደል 100 አለቃ ታፈሰ በየ ስለጠየቁ -- እውራው አደጋ ከማድረሱ በፊት በጥይት እንዲገደል ተፈቅዷል።

We previously ordered the Chilga police force office to kill a lion that ate cows in the Mātāma district via letter Ref. No.7274/40/44 on January 21, 1962. A similar case is now happening in the Sahel sub district and Lieutenant Tafese Beyene has requested to kill the lion before it devours cattle. He has been granted permission to kill the wild animal by gun before it strikes again. (NGA File No. ሠ/4; 10/07/1954 E.C.)

The Imperial government introduced the first proclamation for the protection of wild animals in 1944. However, while hunting was practiced both by government representatives and local people, it seemed legal for the government, but illegal for the people. When government officials permitted to kill wild animals, it hence opened the way for poaching. This clearly shows that, at that time, the government did not consider wild animals as part of the country's wealth. The disappearance of wild animals was incalculable under the direct order of the government either through poison or direct shooting.

From the discovery to the protection of walia

Before the discovery of the walia ibex in 1963 by Leslie Brown, neither the Ethiopian government nor the local populations knew that the walia and others animals were endemic to Ethiopia. Local people used to call the walia *Yeyared fiyel*, i.e. "Yared's goat." The name originated from a tradition that claimed that St Yared came to the area with this wild goat, which he used as a pack animal. Once he reached the mountain called after him, Qiddus Yared, he left the goat, which thereafter settled in the region (MIA File No. ጠ/41; 04/02/1962 E.C.). The government, for his part, was oblivious of this animal. Thus, when it carried out the first nation-wide surveys on wild animals in the 1940s, the name of walia ibex was not found in the documents. Similarly,



Figure 2. The very first image of a walia, drawn by Leslie Brown in 1963

Source: NGA, File No. 7/2; 06/03/1956 E.C.

in 1955 and 1958, the Simen districts and sub districts listed the existence of wild animals such as hyenas, foxes or monkeys, but the walia ibex was not mentioned (NGA File No. 7/2; 09/12/1951 E.C.).

This changed as soon as 1963, when UNESCO organized a survey mission in Simen in order to study the flora and fauna of Ethiopia. The mission was led by the British naturalist Leslie Brown, who also visited the Bale Mountains in order to assess the status of mountain Nyala. The chief purpose was to study the wild animals of the Simen Mountains. Brown's tour was arranged by Wolde Mikael Kelecha, Director of the new Wildlife Conservation Department at Addis Ababa, and Eshete Wondimagegnehu was appointed as a travel companion. On October 18, 1963, after a three days journey, they arrived in Gondar. There, Major General Nega Haile Selassie, governor of Begemder and Simen governorate general, gave Brown permission to go to Ras Dejen. On October 23, he reached Däbark, where *grazmach* Mitiku Taye, officer of Debark District Police Station, arranged guards to accompany him. From October 24 to December 6, Brown carried out a systematic study of the nature of the walia ibex, in particular in the areas of Adisgay, Gich, Ambaras, Bwahit, and Ras Dejen. In the afternoon of December 6, he returned to Däbark and finally, on December 9, he reached Addis Ababa (NGA File No. 7/2; 06/03/1956 E.C.).

As a result of Brown's surveys, the existence of the endemic species walia ibex or *capra walia* was recognized. Brown was able to locate a total of 41 specimens in different areas of the park to be created, including Gich, Mitigo, and Adisgay, but he did not see any in Ambaras and Ras Dejen. Out of the 41 animals spotted, 5 were male and 16 were female, while the sex of the 20 remaining walia was not identified. According to Brown, this sample represented about one-fourth of the total of walia population, which he estimated between 150 and 200. In his report, he informed that most of them were female with their offspring. Brown recommended that the government should protect these unique wild animals and save them from extinction. If the government took the proper conservation measures, they

would reproduce and catch up their “original” number. Brown believed that the walia originated from Kenya (NGA File No. 7/2; 06/03/1956 E.C.). A few years later, the Swiss Dr. Bernhard Nievergelt would express skepticism with regards to the number of walia specimens suggested by Brown (MIA File No. 11/41; 19/02/1961 E.C.).

Table 1. Number of walia observed by a police delegation in 1963

<i>No</i>	<i>Date of observation</i>	<i>Region</i>	<i>Seen in group</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>Remarks</i>
1	25/10/1963	Gich	4	1	3	
2	26/10/1963	Gich	2			
3	29/10/1963	Mitigo	1	1		

Source: NGA, File No. 7/2; 06/03/1956 E.C.

Table 2. Number of walia observed by Leslie Brown in 1963

<i>No</i>	<i>Date of observation</i>	<i>Region</i>	<i>Seen in group</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>female</i>	<i>Gilgel</i>	<i>Remark</i>
1	25/10/1963	Gich	2		2		
2	25/10/1963	Gich	1				maybe female
3	25/10/1963	Gich	1		1		
4	25/10/1963	Gich	4		2	2	
5	25/10/1963	Gich	1	1		2	
6	25/10/1963	Gich	7	11	2	2	2 unknown; 5 maybe female
7	26/10/1963	Sederek	4		2	2	
8	27/10/1963	Sederek	6	11	4	1	
9	28/10/1963	Sederek	4				4 unknown
10	29/10/1963	Mitigo	1				1 maybe male
11	11/04/63	Gich	3				Maybe 1 male & 1 female
12	Total		34	23	13	9	

Source: NGA, File No. 7/2; 06/03/1956 E.C.



Figure 3. A group of walia in 2013

Source: Girma Tayachew Asmelash, 2015

On January 15, 1964, joining the copy of Brown's report, the Ministry of Agriculture wrote a letter to Begemder and Simen governorate general about walia:

ከኬንያ ወደ ኢትዮጵያ መጥተው በሰሜን ተራራ ላይ ስለሚገኘው ዋሊያ ስለተባለው የዱር አውሬ ጥናት በመውሰድ የቆዩት እንግሊዛዊ ሚስተር ብራውን - በሰሜን መረጃ መሰረት ለዚህ የዱር አውሬ አስፈላጊውን የጥበቃ ስነ-ስርዓት እንዲፈጸም እያሳሰብን በጉብኝታቸው ላይ ላደረጉላቸው መልካም እርዳታ እናመሰግናለን።

As we think that the wild animal called walia comes from Kenya and exists in the Simen Mountains studied by the British man Mr. Brown, we inform you that the walia needs maximum protection and we thank you for your assisting Mr. Brown while he conducted his study. (MIA File No. ፳/41; 07/05/1956 E.C.)

Following Brown's trip, the status of walia changed dramatically. Soon the Ministry of Pen was informed about this wild animal. In a written letter dated May 27, 1964, it confirmed its endemic nature to the Ministry of Agriculture. On the same day the Ministry of Agriculture sent a message classified as "top" to Lieutenant General Nega Haile Selassie, governor general of Begemder and Simen informing him that the killing or trapping of walia was strictly forbidden (NGA File No. ፳/41; 19/09/1956 E.C.). Indeed, from its "discovery" onwards, all ministerial offices as well as the offices of the governorate of Begemder and Simen were compelled to save and protect this wild animal.

In addition, after disseminating the news to the world, foreign scientists pursued the study of this new animal species. Thus, the Carnegie Museum of Art, in Pittsburg, USA, requested the Imperial government permission to kill one male walia for the purpose of scientific research. Permission was eventually granted on September 10, 1963 (MIA File No. 71/1; 05/13/1956 E.C.). Yet, the project encountered initial opposition from the officials of the Simen province, who were keen on protecting the valuable species (MIA File No. ፩/41; 20/04/1957 E.C.). After pressure from the Ministry of Interior and the intervention of *qegnasmach* Bekele Zelelew, the two American hunters sent by the Carnegie Museum, R. James and Mr. Miller, managed to carry out their mission (MIA File No. ፩/41; 20/04/1957 E.C.).

The new discovery also got the attention of Emperor Haile Selassie, who became eager to see this new species. Lieutenant General Nega Haile Selassie ordered Nadew Woreta to trap one animal (MIA File No. ፩/41; 24/05/1957 E.C.). Nadew Woreta, the vice *agafari* of the governorate general, was born and lived in Simen Ambaras. Eventually, it was Ambaw Achenef who, on January 30, 1965, at 4:00 o'clock in the morning, captured a six month old female walia, the first animal of this kind to be captured alive. One man died of an accident in this rugged terrain in the course of the mission. On his way back, Ambaw travelled for 103 kms from Simen Mountains to Debark (MIA File No. ፩/41; 24/05/1957 E.C.). The next day, the animal was brought to Gondar and later sent to Addis Ababa: (MIA File No. ፩/41; 24/05/1957 E.C.). Unfortunately, the specimen died when arriving in the Arat Kilo Palace. Thereafter, the Emperor ordered Lieutenant General Nega Haile Selassie to capture a male specimen of walia. The order was executed, and Agafari Nadew and Arega Teka trapped a female walia and her son at Ras Dejen (informant: Behailu Nadew).

A new step towards the protection of walia was achieved in 1965 when, following recommendations by UNESCO and the Carnegie Museum (Anberbir Mebrate, 1976: 37), the Ethiopian government set to demarcate the habitat of walia ibex. After hearing rumors according to which the expected measures had not been implemented, Haile Selassie issued a series of new directives to delimitate the living area of the walia. The Begemder and Simen governorate general then employed guards to protect the species and stop agriculture-driven deforestation of their habitat (Tesfaye Hundesa, 2012: 3-4). On February 27, 1965 the appointment of guards was officially announced. The “Walia conservation organization” would be led by *ato* (later *balambaras*) Negash Woreta, while different guards were appointed for the six regions inhabited by walia: *ato* Yirga Alemayehu between Debark and Dib Bahr district administration, from Sankaber to Gich-Mitigo regions; *ato* Alemu Belete between Janamora and Telmt district administration, from Sliqi walia

qend-Qedus Yared to Semsemá; *ato* Mitiku Ambaw² between Janamora and Dib Bahir district administration, from Mitigo to Buahit track; *ato* Tiru Aragaw between Dib Bahr and Janamora District administration, from Shagenie to Agdamia; *ato* Ezeze Nadew³ between Dib Bahr and Janamora District administration, from Agdamia to Azemach Ya'ecob; and finally *ato* Asfaw Zerihun for the Beyeda *district*, from Segenet-Tefaw Lezer to Ras Dashen.

The representative of the government, Lieutenant General Nega Haile Selassie, also instructed Negash Woräta that the different areas had to be identified and demarcated. Eventually, on February 26, 1965, Negash Woräta would be replaced by his brother, Nadew Woreta, as leader of the park guards (MIA File No. ፯/2; 19/06/1957 E.C.). Concerning the protection policies for the walia, the following measures were taken: when it came to the areas inhabited by walia, it was forbidden to kill or trap walia but also to cut trees, harvest, set fire to grass, and plow. Additionally, the role of the guards was strictly regulated. On the one hand, each guard was armed with a Minishir rifle and thirty bullets and received a monthly salary of twenty birr. The organization responsible for paying the salary was the governorate general Agricultural Office under the agent of the Simen province Netch Lebash Office. On the other hand, the guards were requested to respect the following rules: to protect the walia and other wild animals from human accidents; if poachers were to enter the areas of the walia, the guards had the right to capture and submit them to the concerned bodies; to collaborate and assist the visitors and those holding legal permission in killing walia; and to carefully watch the walia (MIA File No. ፯/41; 19/06/1957 E.C.).

In 1965/66 Richard Guez, American representative of the UNESCO, was appointed head of the Simen Mountains National Park (MIA File No. ፯/41; 19/06/1957 E.C.). In 1968, another study mission led by two Swiss zoologists, Dr. Bernhard Nievergelt and his wife, was launched. Their fieldwork would linger for one year. They also worked with Guez, and then Clive W. Nicol.⁴ Dr. Bernhard Nievergelt issued a lot of recommendations for the protection of walia and the future implementation of the National Park. At this time there was a disagreement between Nicol and Agafari Nadew, head of the guards. Nievergelt was a mediator to solve their problems (MIA File No. ፯/1; 29/05/1960 E.C.).

Even though those challenges were important, formerly endangered wild animals such as Capra Walie, Simen Fox and others, soon became national symbols. A lot of organizations and institutions were to be established in the

² Mitiku Ambaw was the son of Ambaw Mitiku, who captured a walia specimen for Emperor Haile Selassie for the first time.

³ The son of Nadew Woreta. ⁴ C.W. Nicol was the one of the warden who proposed the establishment of the Simen Mountains National Park and laid down its foundation.

name of walia, for instance: Walia National Football Team, Walia Insurance, Walia Beer, etc.

The behavior of walia

The early studies on walia ibex also led to interesting findings concerning the behavior and particularities of this species. According to Leslie Brown, walia starts searching for food in the morning, from about 9:30 to 11:30, and cannot move during the night time. The gender of the animal can be identified because females are relatively shorter than male and their offspring do not isolate from their mother. After morning foraging, the animals return to wooded areas and come out again in the afternoon towards 4 PM to eat grass. They tend to move near monkey groups, which are effectively used to warn them of the presence of humans (NGA File No. ሸ/2; 06/03/1956 E.C.). In turn, according to Nievergelt, the walia moves in groups not larger than sixteen. When they see humans, they quickly run away (MIA File No. ጠ/41; 22/02/1961 E.C.). The female based groups include kids and young males up to two or three years. Each group is relatively small, ranging from five to twenty individuals, although sometimes they reach up to fifty. The animal is polygynous and, unlike other ibex species, breeds all the year around, though with a rutting peak from March to May. They reach sexual maturity after their first year. Generally, the walia ibex are grazers, though eating a variety of herbaceous and woody plants, including bushes, herbs, shrubs, and grasses. During the dry season, they take rest on rock ledges and are active in the morning and evening (Nievergelt, 1981: 189).

Locals also pondered on the character of walia ibex. Thus, on the basis of *balambaras* Negash Woreta's evidence, Lieutenant General Nega Haile Selassie forwarded to Emperor Haile Selassie the following description of the animal: the body size of a male walia is equal to a bull; they prefer to live in an open area and in the *dega* ecological region; they eat grass and the leaves of *qega* but don't eat *injera*⁵ or crop grains; the animal seems dead when asleep and when seeking protection he runs fast towards a steeply area (MIA File No. ጠ/41; 04/02/1962 E.C.).

The stages of development of adult walia could also be established. The male walia has six stages of development: gilgel erema (ግልገል ለፊማ); qeb (ቁብ); woáéac (ወጠጤ); fungay (ፋንጋይ); aräbay (አረባይ); and bahitay (ባህታይ). The female, on the contrary, has four: gilgel (ግልገል); erema (ለፊማ); erez (አሬዝ); and yigma (ይግማ). When the male adult has reached the last stage, bahitay, he isolates himself from the group until his death.

⁵ An Ethiopian traditional food mostly made from teff, or other crops like millet, maize, or wheat.

Walia does not easily adapt or cannot live alone or in captivity. According to local accounts, if one walia is captured, it will die by colliding himself from stone or tree (informants: Behailu Nadew; Shambel Setargew Mekonen; MIA File No. $\alpha/41$; 24/05/1957 E.C.).

Conclusion

Not only Ethiopian peasants were hunting wild animals, but government officials also participated to the hunt of wild animals in the Simen Mountains. In 1963, the UNESCO mission led by Leslie Brown discovered animals such as walia Ibex (*Capra Walie*), Simen Fox, Gelada Baboon, etc. Following the discovery of walia and of the fact that it was as an endemic animal, the Imperial government embarked on conservation mechanisms, with the efforts of foreigners. A lot of programs were elaborated. Finally, the Simen Mountains National Park was established in 1969, following the recommendation of UNESCO. It became a site of touristic attraction and the foundation of the park became practical. The government employed guards to protect walia and natural forests. The guards and other visitors tried to study the behavior and the growth of walia. In addition to representatives of the government, local inhabitants and the UN played their own role for the creation of this international heritage site.

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File No. ፡፡/41; 04/02/1962 E.C.; Ref. No. bar62, Balambaras Negash Woreta to Dejazmach Arya Gebre Medhin, governor of Simen Province,

List of informants

No	Name of informant	Age	Date of interview	Remarks
1	Amha Nadew	46	29/09/2006 E.C.	The son of <i>grazmach</i> Nadew Woreta, he was born at Ambaras Qebele; now he teaches at Ediget feleg secondary school in Gondar.
2	Behailu Nadew	43	29/07/2006 E.C.	The son of <i>grazmach</i> Nadew Woreta, he was born at Ambaras Qebele; he is now a judge.
3	Kiros Negash	49	27/08/2006 E.C.	The son of <i>balambaras</i> Negash Woreta, he now lives in Janamora and works as civil servant
4	Mesfin Kebede	77	05/09/2006 E.C.	He was born in Tach Armachiho and lived in Gondar in his early age. But he vividly remembers everything from the past
5	Shanbel Setargew Mekonen	71	12/09/2006 E.C.	A farmer in Ambaras and one of the participants in the foundation of Simen National Park.
6	Muhammed Sied Muhe	36	25/04/05 E.C.	He was born and grew in Simen Mountains and now teaches at Azezo high school.
7	Worku Bogale (cadet)	78	19/04/2005 E.C.	He was a soldier in the period of Haile Selassie and he is now retired.

Abstract

The main objective of this paper is to reconstruct the history of the discovery of the walia ibex that led to the creation of the Simen Mountains National Park as a heritage site. Despite the fact both the physical geography of the park and the walia ibex have been well studied, little is known regarding what exactly occurred before the park was established. The study draws on research carried out in the archives of the North Gondar Zone Administration Office, interviews with some of the historical actors, and published as well as unpublished documents. In 1963, after the UNESCO-funded mission that found walia ibex as one of the endemic animals of Ethiopia, both the Ethiopian government and foreign agencies struggled to protect the walia ibex. The Simen Mountains National Park was established

in 1969. However, during six years, while the Simen Mountains were already supposed to be ruled as part of a national park as soon as 1963, not only that the local society rejected the new laws and regulations, but the area remained a place of hunting for both the local populations and the Ethiopian representatives.

Keywords: wildlife, endemic species, walia ibex, national parks, poaching/hunting

Résumé

La faune sauvage du Simen sous la protection du gouvernement d'Hailé Sélassié: de proie menacée à symbole national (1941-1969). – Cet article a pour principal objectif la reconstruction de l'histoire de la découverte du walia ibex. Celle-ci date de la création du Simen Mountains National Park comme site patrimonial. Bien que la géographie physique du parc tout comme le walia ibex ont déjà été bien étudiés, peu de choses sont connues concernant ce qu'il s'est exactement passé avant l'établissement du parc. Cette étude s'appuie sur des recherches menées dans les archives du *North Gondar Zone Administration Office*, sur des entretiens avec certains des acteurs historiques, et sur des documents publiés et non publiés. En 1963, après la mission fondatrice de l'UNESCO qui établit le walia ibex comme l'un des animaux endémiques de l'Éthiopie, le gouvernement éthiopien et les agences étrangères décident de protéger le walia ibex. Le Simen Mountains National Park fut établi en 1969. Néanmoins, pendant six ans, alors que les montagnes du Simen étaient déjà supposées être gouvernées comme un parc national dès 1963, non seulement la société locale rejetait les nouvelles lois et réglementations, mais la région demeurait également un lieu de chasse à la fois pour les populations locales et les représentants éthiopiens.

Mots-clefs: faune sauvage, espèces endémiques, walia ibex, parcs nationaux, braconnage/chasse